

27 April 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : Robert R. Bowie
Deputy to the DCI for National Intelligence

SUBJECT : Memorandum on What Are the Soviets Up To in Berlin?

1. Action Requested: The attached memorandum should be presented to the President.

2. Background. This memorandum analyzes Soviet objectives in demanding the reduction and eventual cessation of allied military patrols in East Berlin. It estimates that, after the allies reject this demarche (as we understand they will), the Soviets will not let the issue die. It presents two possible Soviet courses of action. The more likely one is that the Soviets will move gradually in building pressure on the West. The more far-reaching possibility is that the USSR, concerned to demonstrate its displeasure with the recent course of US-Soviet relations and its ability to exact a price, will press harder and earlier on Western vulnerabilities in the Berlin area. An annex addresses evidence of current military activity and concludes that it is probably not related to the patrols issue.

3. The text of the allied response to the Soviet demarche is now being negotiated with the French and British. Coordination and delivery will probably take another week.

4. This analysis was drafted by CIA/ORPA and coordinated with other DDI elements and the Strategic Warning Staff under the guidance of the National Intelligence Officer for USSR and Eastern Europe.

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5. Recommendation. I recommend that you deliver this analysis to the President and assure him that we are carefully monitoring political and military developments of possible relevance to this issue.



Robert R. Bowie

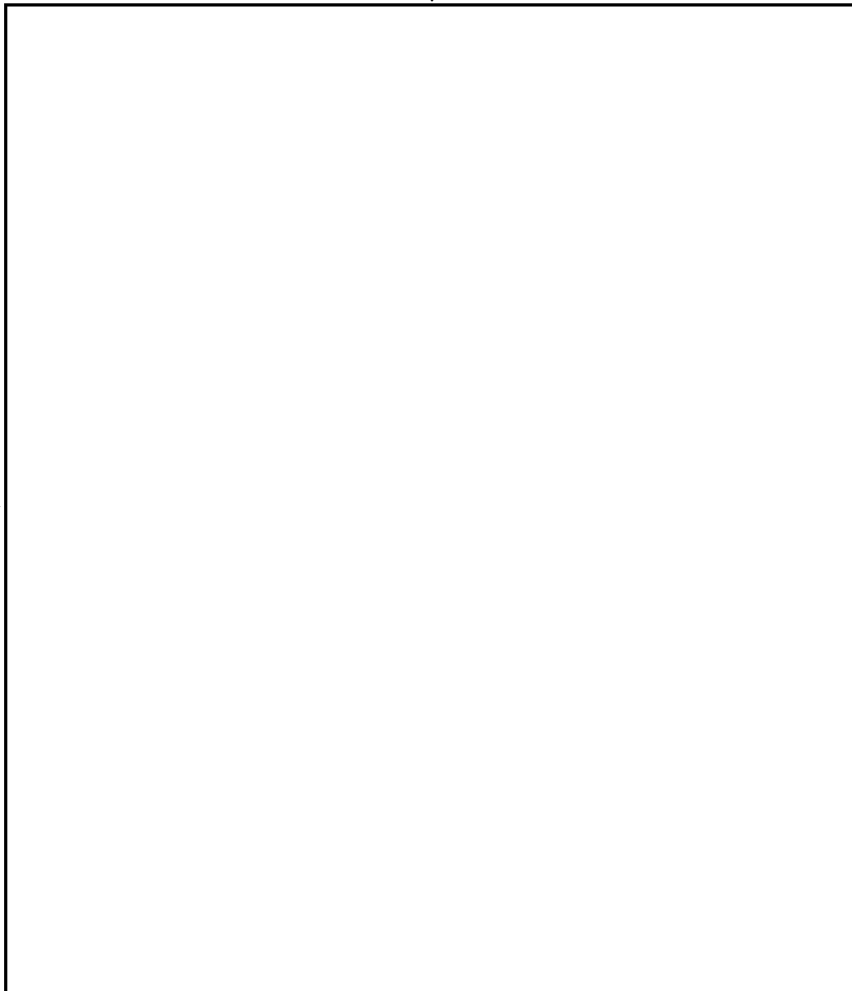
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25X1 SUBJECT: Memorandum on What Are The Soviets Up To in Berlin?



Copy No. 15
26 April 1977

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: What are the Soviets Up To in Berlin

1. There has been considerable concern in the intelligence community over the Soviet demarche of April 15 that the allied patrols in East Berlin be gradually abolished. It can be seen as merely another step in a gradual and long-term effort to whittle away at the Western presence in both parts of Berlin. Beyond this, however, it may mark a significant escalation of this process directly related to Soviet dissatisfaction with the Carter administration's policy toward the USSR.

The East German Problem

25X1 2. We know [] that the East Germans began pressuring the Soviets last summer for permission to take steps that would underline the independence and the sovereignty of the GDR. The East German leaders evidently thought that making manifest the sovereignty of the GDR and particularly East Berlin as its capital would help give the lie to West German pretensions regarding "one Germany" and would ease the building internal pressure for free travel and emigration to the West. The East Germans were reacting to what they regarded as West Germany's increased assertiveness on West Berlin and heightened propaganda directed at the East German people. The GDR clearly was fearful of the destabilizing effect on the East German people, manifested by the increased number of East Germans applying for emigration to the West. It was in this context that Ambassador Dobrynin raised orally with Secretary Kissinger last June the question of the allied flag tours in East Berlin.

3. The Soviets and the East Germans decided not to push these steps until after the West-German and US elections. Moscow, in particular, did not want to jeopardize Schmidt's election. With the elections out of the way, the East Germans, with Moscow's concurrence, took steps in the winter to tighten requirements for entry from the West and to remove some of the few remaining symbols of the unique status of East Berlin.

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4. None of these steps directly affected allied rights in East Berlin. But in January and February Soviet Ambassador to East Berlin Abrasimov complained to the British and French Ambassadors about the activities of the allied flag patrols in East Berlin. He singled out the American ones and implied that the number of them was excessive and that the Soviet toleration point had been reached. In March, in a public statement he cast doubt on allied military rights in the eastern part of the city.

Soviet Calculations

5. Until recently, the Soviets have been caught between their interest in shoring up stability in East Germany and their concern not to jeopardize their wider equities vis-a-vis detente with Western Europe and the US. Hence, the cautious approach last year and the unofficial trial balloons of Abrasimov this year. The 15 April demarche, however, is a distinct escalation; in presenting a formal demand, the Soviets have come close to committing themselves to some kind of action if the Western allies reject them outright. This demarche complains of the lack of US reaction to the USSR's approach last June and goes beyond that approach to reserve "the right to take the necessary steps" depending on allied reaction.

6. We attribute this change to the enduring problems besetting East German stability, plus some new calculation about the outlook for Soviet-US relations. In the light of the recent trend of those relations, Moscow probably judges:

--that the prospects for early advances in bilateral relations are poor in any event, and

--that it would be useful to remind the US that the Soviets can make trouble at a time of their own choosing and in an area of their own strength.

7. The escalation of the Soviet position on Berlin does not necessarily mean that Moscow intends to move toward an early or sharp confrontation. In view of the present state of relations with the US, Moscow will feel moved to take some follow-up action to underscore its position on allied patrols. But references to gradual reductions and to "not attracting unnecessary attention" suggest a desire to keep the situation within circumscribed bounds. If so, the Soviets will try to draw the allies into talks concerning the question at issue.

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8. A more farreaching hypothesis is that Soviet perceptions of US intentions have changed even more sharply, and that the Soviets believe the new administration no longer intends to acknowledge and accommodate Soviet interests in political and strategic affairs. This has persuaded the Soviet leaders that a bold demonstration of Soviet strength and determination is required. Berlin, in this reading, has been selected as the instrument for enforcing the Soviet claim to superpower equality with the US.

9. We are not persuaded that this latter interpretation of the Soviet motivation is correct, but if it is, it raises the possibility that the Soviets will follow up with other moves to assert East German sovereignty over allied surface and air access to West Berlin. Another possible pressure point is the activity of allied military liaison missions which regularly travel in East Germany.

Military Evidence

10. There has been little to suggest that Soviet forces in East Germany or the East Germans themselves are preparing for any actions that might carry a serious risk of a military confrontation with the three Western allies. An annex reviews current evidence of military activity.

What Next?

11. The Soviets almost certainly anticipate that the US and the Allies will reject their demarche. It seems likely, therefore, that Moscow already has thought out its next move, although its timing and implementation may well depend on the substance of the US response. The odds favor the USSR's taking some action within days or weeks of getting a Western rejection. This could be a combination of minor harassment of allied patrols, repeated diplomatic approaches, and perhaps a call for four-power consultations under the Quadripartite Agreement. If Soviet concerns are more farreaching -- and particularly if they are seeking to demonstrate power and will -- they might go beyond these measures to bar patrols and to raise other issues affecting allied rights in Berlin.

* * * * *

Postscript: West European Reactions

12. In Western Europe, a Soviet challenge over Berlin would raise fears and lead to contradictory views about practical consequences and responses. The net effect on the Alliance would depend on how clear-cut the challenge was, on Western estimates of Soviet motives, and, of course, on the outcome. Different members of the Alliance would have different thresholds of alarm and different views of what triggered the Soviet move. Those farthest from the front line would be most inclined to minimize the significance, while the West Germans especially would fear that further encroachments were in store. Those who interpreted the move as a riposte to US challenges to the USSR over human rights or SALT would have added doubts about US policy along with added fears about the Soviet threat.

13. Among those more closely involved (France and especially Germany), such a challenge would at least for a time stiffen the sense of purpose and need for the Alliance -- which has sagged with Europe's domestic preoccupations and the reassuring effects of detente. A prolonged confrontation would arouse contradictory tendencies in the NATO states. Some would argue that an implied end of detente called for bold measures to reinvigorate the Alliance and to clinch US commitments; others would want to cut losses and hope that a more cautious Western stance in the future would avoid provoking further Soviet challenges.

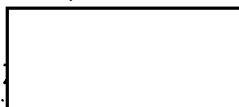
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ANNEX: Evidence of Current Military Activity

We assess Soviet and East German military activity in the forward area as generally consistent with patterns and levels of activity observed in recent years. There is no evidence to link any of this military activity to the issue raised in the Soviet note. Military support of actions to harass or bar Allied patrols in East Berlin would, of course, not require extensive, visible preparations.

At present, military activity in East Germany includes a Soviet exercise in training areas to the southwest of Berlin, an on-going Soviet troop rotation, and increased Soviet reconnaissance. Upcoming activity will probably include an East German mobilization exercise, an East German troop induction, and a Soviet General Staff exercise.

The Soviet units in East Germany currently involved in exercise activity are located in training areas some 80-100 kilometers west and south of Berlin. It is possible that the activity may shift eastward into another training area as the exercise scenario -- probably Western forces against the East -- unfolds. There is good evidence that the Soviets will conduct a General Staff exercise in May. It has been planned since at least last December and is a part of the annual training schedule.

There are indications that the East German army will hold a mobilization exercise in early May, probably to test the new call-up procedures instituted this spring. We do not know the scope and duration of this exercise. The last large-scale mobilization exercise was held in August 1974. The evidence indicates that the semi-annual induction and release of East German conscripts will begin on schedule in early May.

The semi-annual Soviet troop rotation is now under way in Eastern Europe, and the available evidence indicates that the departing troops will be returned to the USSR and discharged. Some of the 120,000 troops to be rotated will be transported by rail, but most will travel on civilian aircraft. In the past there have been as many as 1,200 to 1,300 flights over a period of 14 to 20 days.

Although Soviet intelligence collection and reconnaissance appear generally normal, two reconnaissance aircraft conducted an unusual number of intelligence collection flights over western East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and the Baltic Sea during April. Soviet high-resolution satellite photographic coverage of military targets in West Germany also increased somewhat

during April. Much of this increase is believed to be seasonal or to make up for coverage lost last fall when the USSR concentrated photography against China following the death of Mao Tse-tung.

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